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Argentina: Criticism of Videla

Officers of all three military services in Argentina are said to be increasingly dissatisfied with what they view as President Videla's overly conciliatory, indecisive policies. The dissidents are urging tougher measures against subversives and Peronist labor leaders.

Videla's military critics feel he has allowed only "halfway" measures against the guerrillas, whose attacks have mounted in recent weeks. The officers want a free hand to use any means to deal with not only the guerrillas, but also individuals accused of other types of crimes. This view, is said to be gaining favor in the other services as well.

Videla's moderate policies could eventually weaken his authority there is considerable criticism of the President's tolerant attitude toward the ousted Peronists.

A number of officers reportedly feel that Videla should completely repress the Peronist movement by jailing its main leaders and dismantling its labor organization. the army's III Corps, is said to be the most prominent of those who hold such a view.

Videla's fellow junta member, navy chief Admiral Massera, reportedly also believes that the government has been acting indecisively. He has pointed to failures to move against certain labor unions and slowness in replacing many of the ambassadors removed after the coup. Massera has complained that army chief of staff General Viola, a confidant of Videla's, frequently intercedes to impede actions that Massera and air force chief General Agosti urge on the President.

Videla, as President, is acting in the same deliberate fashion that characterized his preparations for the coup. Faced with a guerrilla movement that has flourished since the late 1960s, he is loath to commit his administration to the unrealistic goal of rapid solution of the problem. Moreover, he fears alienating the Peronists so completely as to drive at least some into the arms of the terrorists.

Admiral Massera with President Videla at rear

Instead Videla clearly hopes to achieve an early success with his innovative, wide-ranging economic plan. A turnaround for the economy would give his administration momentum and reduce the pressure to go all out to deal with security problems. For the time being, Videla's critics seem prepared to go along with him.

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